

It is the distinction of Machiavelli that he gave large scope to "this new tendency of the mind," and went further in his reaction against tradition than his contemporaries. In his advocacy of nationality, his opposition to the papal power, his hostility to feudalism, he is uncompromisingly modern. The papacy, he boldly says, is the curse of Italy. "By the infamous example of that court the land has lost all devotion and all religion. . . . We Italians, then, are first indebted to the Church and the clergy for the loss of our faith and the increase of wickedness ; but we likewise owe them another and a greater obligation which is the cause of our ruin. It is, that the Church has kept and keeps our country divided. And verily no country was ever happy or united save under the complete sway of a republic, or a sovereign, as has been the case with France and Spain."

From this bold deliverance we may feel how far we have left the Middle Ages behind us. Feudalism, too, shares with the Church the guilt of Italy's decay. It is not only antagonistic to national unity, but to republican freedom and equality as well as monarchic supremacy. The wounds of Italy can never be healed as long as these petty magnates of the Romagna, Naples, Rome, and Lombardy are allowed to give rein to their ambition and corruption. So modern is he that his chief practical object in studying history is to discover how he can transform degenerate, divided Italy into an united nation. In this striving he was only seeking to apply to Italy the lesson afforded by contemporary France and Spain, but in so doing he far out-distanced all his Italian contemporaries, and anticipated posterity by three centuries.

The modern spirit is, however, in some respects unfortunate in its champion. Machiavelli reflects the low public and religious spirit of his time. Italian politicians were pure opportunists. A man of principle was as rare as a martyr. Machiavelli himself, for instance, while professing republican principles, craved employment, in spite of repeated rebuffs and cruel tortures, from the destroyer of the Florentine republic. His desperate straits in his exile at San Casciano may be allowed to palliate to some extent the cringing opportunism which otherwise looks so ill in a philosopher. He is wearing out, he pathetically writes to his friend Vittori, in the struggle